

Media Advisory

from the South Carolina Forestry Commission



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Forestry Commission urging extreme caution burning outdoors

COLUMBIA— Amid a dramatic uptick in wildfire ignitions over the last 24 hours, the South Carolina Forestry Commission is asking the public to exercise the utmost vigilance when conducting outdoor burns of any kind.

SCFC's three regional dispatch centers recorded 32 wildfires Thursday, most of which occurred in the central and eastern parts of the state, along both sides of the I-95 corridor throughout the coastal plain. Agency officials cite widespread low relative humidities – below 20% across most of the state – as likely contributing to the increase in wildfire activity.

Did you know...?

An astounding 98 percent of all wildland fires are caused by human activities, and escaped debris burns are responsible for nearly 50 percent of them. South Carolina Forestry Commission firefighters respond to an average of 2,500 wildland fires every year, burning about 18,000 acres annually.

“While we haven’t had a lot of wind, which usually contributes greatly to fast growing wildfires, much of the state is just in a long drying pattern. The lower-than-forecasted RH values today didn’t help,” said SCFC Fire Chief Darryl Jones. “When fuels are really dry, the heat released from outdoor burning can exacerbate the conditions that lead to fires escaping easily and spreading rapidly.”

South Carolina is in the peak of what is traditionally known as “wildfire season” throughout most of the southeastern United States. Jones added that the majority of the Palmetto State’s largest and most destructive wildfires have happened during March and April.

“Prescribed burning is at its height now too, particularly for agricultural fields, timber stands and wildlife management,” he continued. “And the good warm weather we’ve been having is prompting many more people to get outside and burn yard debris as well. It is definitely not a time to be complacent or inattentive when burning outdoors.”

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As the only state agency responsible for wildfire suppression in all unincorporated areas of the state, the South Carolina Forestry Commission protects 13.6 million acres from wildland fire. More than 500 county, municipal and volunteer fire departments operate more than 1,100 fire stations in South Carolina. The Forestry Commission cooperates with these departments to prevent and control structural and wildland fires, employing highly trained firefighters and specialized equipment when fires burn into forested areas that are difficult to reach.